POETRY QUARTERLY

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Typography by Seán Jennett

EDITORIAL

Some of the best reading in *Horizon*, for all its detractors can say, our only successful highbrow magazine, is its editorials. That in the April issue is no exception. Most of it is about things which do not concern us, but the last paragraph does. It is all about the decline of literary values. Now there have been jeremiads about this subject ever since the first journalist learnt to hold a pen and scribble. It has always been a fruitful irritant. The generation of writers just beginning to age always shows signs of disliking the work of those about to come on the scene. This is natural enough. If ten or twenty or thirty years of reading and experience don't make you realize that you are living in a world of slaves, lunatics and badly-brought-up children, it is unlikely you will ever learn anything, and most likely that you will turn to the great and the timeless and have no time for the very young who live for better or worse in a new world which you have come to dislike. Only a little patience and good manners on both sides are necessary. These two are unfortunately in the list of things in decline in our time. In the case of the novel, what *Horizon* says is probably justifiable on the facts, though it is impossible to say whether this is not more than temporary. But to say that the volumes of verse produced in 1946 do not merit the usual omnibus review is just plain silly. We suggest that the real reason is something quite different. Was not Mr. Spender, who alone deals with these matters, too busy to write the necessary article, so the acute and somewhat tart editor in his otherwise admirable comment was able to get in his little dab about the things he does not like or understand. It is all so easy and amusing in an after-dinner manner. We append here a list of books of verse which appeared in 1946 certainly meriting discussion whatever one may think about them. Books of much less importance have been noticed in former articles on this subject.

Norman Nicholson, *The Old Man of the Mountain.*
Edwin Muir, *The Voyage.*
Dylan Thomas, *Deaths and Entrances.*
Ronald Duncan, *This Way to the Tomb.*
Roy Campbell, *Talking Bronco.*
Conrad Aiken, *The Soldier*
Kenneth Patchen, *Outlaw of the Lowest Planet.*
K. Shapiro, *V Letter.*
Kathleen Raine, *Living in Time.*
Durrell, *Cities, Plains and People.*
Walter De La Mare, *The Traveller.*

ALAN ROSS

Antiques

Knowledge is a passion for related things, like love;
we like to get a grip on time and place and sense,
and see each object placed against a background,
from above, as though a concealed light
like sound illumined each possession, offset
its character, and marked it relic of an age
in which its function in a way was fashionable;
though then it lacked that sense of being historic
which now with time it has acquired with rhetoric.

So these objects gleam at us across the table;
silver on polished wood, white heavy discs of glass,
through which the flickering fire lights up mahogany,
and shadows pass through candlesticks of brass
that ring with silent battles of a private agony:
what personal stake was bound up with the loss
of house and plate and family? What factors
caused a change of line upon this faded date?
The tall portraits are uncommunicative as actors.

There is no final act which ensures possession:
we seek by different means for holds on time,
by art and history, or the power which makes
us strut across the stage just long enough
to acquire a knack of learning from the past's mistakes:
but in the end the names and glory fade; the heritage
we leave marks us men of an age, surrounds us
with the more particular foibles of our life and loves,
and finally observes us, like antiques, inside our cage.

The Mirror

The faces opposite are masks of us, the other
personalities which clothe our smiles and eyes,
giving us each another character and poise
from which we peel the outer skin on to ourselves
and leave naked what the other knows
to be the real and only self, the stripped disguise
shed in the terror that the mirror shows.

Now behind us flows across the glass the shadow
that our pasts can only verify and pass
like inanimate dreams beyond our leaning heads,
as each from touch of hand and mouth is led
into a mutual present where the senses meet,
and face to face the double looks
return the meanings that no past can cheat.

For what stares back behind the frozen gaze
is nothing which the mind can reach or capture
but holds within its care a mutability of phase
and feeling, a murmur of passion whose ending
is uncertain—though now the kiss reflects
its nature, that the mirror separates like a curtain,
about which we think, but remain for ever uncomprehending

NICHOLAS MOORE

Solid Urns

Working for love brings very poor returns;
Working for bread-and-butter's less exacting;
Yet it's for love the unequal heart so yearns.

It starts the fire itself, and, when it burns,
Cries out at the inferno it's confecting.
Working for love brings very poor returns.

Flames lick at one's shadow now wherever one turns,
Until one's reduced to a cinder amidst distracting
Desires, yet it's for love that poor heart yearns.

Better an eye for more profitable concerns,
Inept incendiary! When all's conflicting,
Working for love brings very poor returns.

You set the world on fire. But what it earns
In solid cash is not worth the inspecting.
Yet it's for love the unequal heart so yearns.

Much better place your hopes in silver urns,
Strong money-boxes for your wealth's protecting!
Working for love brings very poor returns;
Yet it's for love the unequal heart so yearns.

THOMAS GOOD

Morning in Marseilles

(For LEON-GABRIEL GROS)

Surely as friends we can never abandon
This brilliant triptych, heirloom of the light,
When day plays the virgin, persuasive to prove
Earth's splendour eternal and perpetuity of love.

Leaving the Sunday shore of olives and these aged walls
To crime and the reporter, find an hour and heart to exalt
Rock's amber knuckle and the dazzling waltz
Of a disputed ocean and blue immaculate vault.

No mourning mist closes the future;
Safe from commotion, the ghastly commutation
Of municipal vigils and Calypso's acre,
We, dismissing comparison, may envy the sailor

This is our holocaust, no passive surrender
As the city's back is turned, but swift levitation
Unshaped by subtleties, a less odious adventure
At some anonymous altar to propose dedication.

Midday languishing, lengthens the vista
Reminds us of shadows and some holy faces
Intent on the martyr's fathom, memorial of a coast
Traversed by the three Mary's in an age of grace.

Only the mountains distort, tricked by a vapour
Distilled from the distance, a mirage of green
To conceal a scaffold and appease the visitor
His opiate eye poised between seen and unseen.

Or beauty is marred again in knots of anguish,
Where a channel screams between islands,
Death's steamer stormed, and the wreck
Discovers a melancholy banquet on the cursed deck.

Meditation in Provence

Here by the grace of seasons and the railway,
The throb of violence in the uncurbed wind
Is a sigh, or disposes with masked deliberation
Too many deviations of the mind.

Others debating in this series devised a city,
Plato's boundary measured in words,
All pavements absolved of blood, and the poet
Poised like an ass between eagle and owl.

More vigilant earth's womb ripens to passion,
Laying shadow on shadow to scale,
Only the dancer is strained to denial
By the footlights of terror.

Always beyond the world of faces, remember
The heart's frail latitude, sinecure of a smile,
The soul present in splendour to assist in creation,
A short extravasation of the blood and bile.

DANNIE ABSE

The Journey

I

Goodbye to you, dear of blood,
Your eyes will never grow my grave,
I'm leaving behind me your terror,
I'm leaving behind me your love.

Goodbye to the lights of the city,
to the houses that are wombs in pain,
I'm off to their dark country
I shall never return again.

Goodbye to the knife and the fruit,
to the blood in the virgin's scream,
I'm leaving behind me the weather,
I'm leaving behind me the dream.

Say goodbye to the receding station
goodbye to my friends that remain,
I'm going to explore their country
I shall never return again.

Goodbye to the waving handkerchief,
to the rails that slide behind,
for I am in love with their country
where no stars fall in the wind.

II

Ten years since I left you, heart,
ten years I have lived in this stone-mirror
and still no stars fall in the wind.

I have seen your eyes that watch me.

Now it is autumn and the pebbles
drop, drop, from the stone boughs,
bouncing upon the cobbles. O when
will the rain fall, soon, surely soon
the clouds will open their fists?

Clambering over the boulders, my tongue
is carved in stone song. I repeat, it is
autumn, and the catapult of trees
fires the stone birds to a strange land.

Here it is the season of stone, and the tide
has receded never to return. Under the rocks
the peoples pray until they become stiff
and twisted into statue gestures.
When will the peace come, when shall
we know the overwrought peace?

A shadow flies over this country,
like a heavy hand a shadow flies over.
I say that the statues have veins of stone.
O where have the flames gone?
Here is only laughter insensate out of stone,—
and stone tears and stone voices.

When will the wind return?
When will the iron moon move?
When will the sculptured stars flicker
and the wind rejoice?

Now I break your eyes that watch me, and I
hear the stone cry . . . but wait, but listen,
the lightning flashes, the lightning flashes,
yet weep, yet weep, for from the sky only pebbles fall.

III

Here no stars fall in the wind,
here no girl opens my ground,
but how can I replant dead seeds
and grow again into your wound?

I would return to your heart's security,
but now your eyes own another's tomb;
who has not seen the sky shudder
and felt terribly alone?

I have been too long in this country,
I have bartered your love for stone,
I have seen my face in others;
can I atone?

DAVID WRIGHT

Child Waters

Child Waters stood beside my bed.
I am the lover and the bride.
I ford the water and my son
Unborn about his golden head
Hears the green swirl that walls my womb.
It is my horse I run beside;
I in the stable and the hay
Am brought to bed, while in the hall
I eat and drink, the harpers play;
I wish to God that I were dead.
I cannot murder with a fist
This mortal immortality,
The love that wounds me in the tomb,
Or stalks me living, this it is
That makes this life my suicide.

Poem

To Fred Marnau

To take from a goose a feather to bind a wound,
Strike the drowned hair of a harp to hear
The voice of a dead girl speak
Over the plains of Europe like sailing clouds
With justice of us, her unfailing murderers,
Whose crooked smoke
Drifts now against the guttering candelabras.
It is made from her breast-bone,
And if the mouth is dumb, then the long hair
Stretched tight across can wring
From its accusing threads the perished voice.
O take from a goose a feather to bind the wound,
Strike the drowned hair,
For the chalice is spilt, and the palaces
Topple, the leaning cathedrals crash to the ground.

DENISE LEVERTOV

Interim

(For K. S.)

A black page of night
flutters: dream on or waken,
words will spring from darkness now,
gold-bright, to fill the hollow mind
laid still to hear them, as an iron cup
laid on the window-ledge, would fill with rain.
Not more alone
waking than sleeping, in darkness than in light,
yet it is now we can assume
an attitue more listening than longing,
extend invisible antennæ towards
some intimation, echo, emanation
falling slowly like a destined feather
that lights at last before the feet
of hesitating fear. Not less alone
in city than in solitude, at least
this time—an hour or minute?—left between
dreaming and action, where the only glitter
is the soft gleam of words, affording
intimacy with each submerged regret,
awakes a new lucidity in pain,
so that with day we meet
familiar angels that were lately tears
and smile to know them only fears transformed.

Solace

Memories at best are old wives ghosts,
transparent and incredible, their chains
clanking grotesquely. Only an unforeseen
access of longing in the blood can bear
the risen burden of true ghosts, that are
powerful and neat as, on a moor,
the immanent spirit of a rock may seem; are warm
to touch, and, fading, undermine
the elaborate bulwarks of indifference.

Better to drift, happy, among stone faces
which, looking back, are alive, but exact nothing,
neither a past nor a future; to commune
with Apollo's impersonal smile, which surrounds
your listening silence like a phrase of music.

The head of Euripides or a tense
Egyptian cat (so still, you feel
it turns and stretches when you look away)
are not more distant than a lover
in a far country (*does it rain there,*
the small rain in the streets of home?
Do you sleep sound or hear the dripping eaves?)

Not less real, the melancholy, eager,
black-olive eyes of lost Byzantium
than recollected glances met
last year or yesterday, and now forgotten
even while longing strives to raise a ghost.

TESSA M. SILLARS

Dedication

There is singing and light and the warmth of a myriad candles
Shining through my transparent flesh.
And I walk through the dark music of the forest
And where the high note sings among the lemon groves,
Carrying my heart most gently and with still concentration,
Shielding the flame and the burning oil.

The soft skins of the horses that follow at my side
In slow processional walk,
Shine with the tears my heart has spilt;
And there is tiptoe silence in the deep snow
Where the white unicorn has passed and left no footprints

Here, at the shrine,
Wearing a small, slow smile, and my wrists aching with stillness,
I lift the votive lamp to its appointed niche,
And can leave the quiet place with no prayer
For the tending of the flame.

It will burn.

J. B. PICK

Prayer

Oh monks in monasteries of light
Break open all the hills like hearts
The air made liquid by the prayers of birds
Joy drawn by compasses about the morning.
O mercy to the lost, the beaks of pride,
The broken will, the cold mind's suicide,
Light on the high hills and the gold day's burning!
Mercy to the knowing who accept no pain,
And to the lambs at slaughter, to the broken grain,
Mercy to the womb.
Amen.

EDGAR FOXALL

Meadow

Green arm stretched towards a dappled hill,
These evening trees speak on a quiet wind,
This water, still unhurried, flows from points
Of brown, old earth. O green immaculate
Spaces of peace. Here eyes attempt no more
Their twisting fantasies of forced completion,
But rest between the spears of rush and sedge,
Where an old monochrome of willow drips
Far from those gyves where is a world distracted
By infamous heritages, fears and rumours;
A world that stamps and stammers in defeat
And lures its music through a galled skull.

The crows are out, the wind freshens and falls,
And speckled distance shudders in the light
Of a declining sun; a warm cloud curls
Round a thin steeple and a curve of pine,
And in a copse a red horse rubs its flank
Against the shining bole of a worn elm,
For time is nothing here, and death has grace
Only to furnish life with blood and space.

Here the rough grasses whistle in the blue
Wandering air; campion, oxeye, cowslip,
Wait for the patient night, when noises bend
Round stack and mound, round copse and leaning mill,
And all our human foibles are lost;
When Aries shall arise and the Great Bear
Shall from a vast indifference look down
And nothing see, so small our world and us.
So small, so full of tears and dust,
So small, even upon this meadow,
This world of light, this light of wind and shadow.

RICHARD FREEBORN

To Ignatius in the Spring

Here in a climate of legends the sea often lies
like yesterday's obituary, warns all of peace
that scatters written jots of thoughts
and elevates next summer's butterflies;
here in the graveyard at the town's perimeter
motion stops with the sea laid bare as a board.

Sometimes it is we meet ourselves, our ghosts
walking through the electric evening, meet and say:
This time does not cease with a gesture made
or a word said but subsides only
round in calling circles and circles of eyes
that slip to the hemorrhage of the sea and the sky.

Then you turn up the street and there is summer waiting
to be taken into your hands like a moth
and to be contained in the hollow of two hands
to be watched from the outside as a scientist watches.
Then that one next to you turns to look you full in the face
and the hands shut like a book quite tight.

There is extravagant talking and walking to foreign places
where summer is a drink to be taken at leisure
and monotones from gramophones drop dull as suds
or entwined in the local park lovers unhinge their hearts
to wonder at the moon's dilemma or their own
too-rapid dreams that catch amongst the pylons.

Here in a climate of legends it is time for summer,
time for spring and the non-political cuckoo,
time for reading obituaries, time for dying
and time for a journey beyond the curtained room
to a land where the last letter has been written,
to a land empty like an eyelid without an eye.

'*As snow caresses line of air*'

As snow caresses line of air
falling in stasis, as snow disturbs
so I am disturbed
by a word on the stairway about dreams
through catchments of vacuum falling
there imprisoned as roses.

I am determined to inhabit
the city squandered by famine
of birds rising to senses of sunlight
and of the quiet women who soothe
with their songs as lucid as sleep.
In all quarters I have determined
to inhabit this silent city.

And after the wound is made, the dream scissored
into half-formed words, only emptiness remains, only
a cloud enclosed in a skull, a talker
at breakfast time who emphasizes this
or that with mild, incisive gesture;
afterwards I see through sleep the sleepless roses fall
like fingers dropped upon a cotton dress.

The city swoons with half-opened windows
and fountains break upon the quiet stairway
when I am disturbed by a word
about dreams fastened in shapes in smiles
or weighted calendars of yesterdays
that promised a letter or a dream or
this unhealed wound grown cold.

RICHARD EBERHART

Æsthetics After War

(To A. Nykyforczya,
Student of Sighting

The floating reticle became your eye,
You saw flashing battle,

You returned in the death lists.)

I. PROPOSITIONS

Is the rose the same after it is seen?
Is it brighter if the seer has a blighted gall bladder?

If a poet is colour blind, either by nature,
Or say by choice,
So that his deep wish to see purple
Gives him constitutionally a purple world,
As the romanticist finds excess where others
Do not find it,
As the classical scholar finds the world more classical
Than any striking steel worker knows it,
As the æsthetician finds the world
An æsthete's paradigm, to whom then
The pleasure principle is the end of all,
Do the poet, the romanticist, the classicist, the æsthetician
By their profound aberration
Discover the true reality of nature?

What is the relation of æsthetics to philosophy?
Should there be any?
Is its branch an authentic olive tree?
If you contemplate the rose, do you have to think about it?
If you achieve a beatific state
In the contemplation of the rose
Are you loving wisdom?
Is it possible to achieve abstract purity,
The ultimate knowledge of the object rose,
Without a mystical infiltration?

Should an æsthetician wish to think?
Should a thinking æsthetician want to know God?
Will God appear in the ultimate stillness of the rose?

Keats confused, confounded two centuries
By ambivalent, ambiguous
Mating of truth with beauty
Or are these absolutes safe in unattainability?
So that the searcher, as centuries ago,
May struggle, physically, logically, semantically
Or by purposive derangement of the senses
To find them, being relatively certain
Their abstraction will inhere and remain
Long after his bones have turned to very earth?

What has æsthetics to do with society?
Was the Italian airman crazy
When he saw æsthetic purity
In bombs flowering like roses a mile below?
He could not see nor feel the pain of man.
Our own men testify to awe,
If not to æsthetic charm,
On seeing man's total malice over Hiroshima,
That gigantic, surrealistic, picture-mushroom
And objectification of megalomania.
A world of men who butcher men
In the arsenical best interests of several states,
The modern warring maniacal man,
Is this world of men inimical
To the postulates of the study æsthetics?

II. INSTRUMENTS

There are many intricate pieces of workmanship,
Precise instruments like the Mark 18 Sight,
With a floating reticle and a fixed reticle,
The fixed being a circle of light with a cross at the centre,
The floating being eight brilliant diamond points of light
In a broken circle which enlarges and contracts
Framing the enemy wingspan, increasing
As the enemy plane comes nearer, grows larger,
Decreasing as it flies away, grows smaller,

The whole floating reticle a dream of beauty,
But accurate to a split second of gunfire,
Its gyroscopic precision solving all problems
Of boresight, the pursuit curve,
Of wind drift, range, of bullet pattern
So that a semi-automaton all the young gunner
Has to do is to frame the enemy plane
In this brilliant circle of light and blaze away.

This is one of a bewildering array of imaginations.
Radar, as another expression of ingenious invention,
In its excessive, but already dated modernity,
Only gives man what bats have used for centuries,
Whose vibrations, beyond the reach of the human ear,
Strike obstacles which echo back to warn the bat
Who instantly evades each thing that would harm,
Although he seems to us to employ erratic flight.

Warfare spurs man to electrify himself with technics
But never can the human be contraverted
And as the Mark 18 Sight is only the fastest
Eye in the fastest brain, the perfectly anticipatory one,
And as radar is only an equal intelligence
To the ancient, instinctive knowledge of the bat,
So mankind in his abrasive rigours
Constructing the mazes of his complex aircraft
Often unwittingly makes them look like huge
Beetles or other insects, and I have seen
Hundreds of Corsairs parked in the evening glow
Their wings folded back ethereal as butterflies.

If a floating reticle in an electrical sight,
If a radar screen with its surrealistic eeriness,
If an airplane poised on the ground like a butterfly
Are beautiful, is their beauty incidental?
Is it man's limitation that his mechanical creations
Perforce cannot escape from his manhood?
And that try as he will, his works are human
And never stray far from the functions of the natural?

The mystery is whether the object
Mystifies man,

Or whether the mysteriousness within man
Transubstantiates the object;
Whether the world is finally mysterious,
Or if the Deity has put a mystery in man.

III. THE PULL OF MEMORY

Each argument begets its counterpart,
Only in opposites the truth is human,
Intelligible, the shoemaker Boehme said.
I recall a steamer on the Pearl River
Slipping out from teeming Canton,
Hong Kong outward bound through swarming sampans,
The glow of the East, the intense hot day,
The swan sweep of the boat on swan-swept water,
The lull of the hours in the yellow afternoon,
I remember walking the deck
Watching the ritual of the opium eaters
Through glassless windows in the inner sanctum,
Sensing their subtle gestures and serene manners
Through the prolonged trance of the opium haze;
Then looking out, on the banks of the Pearl River
Ancient of days, and of centuries,
There stood a tall pagoda old as the memories of China.
So Buddha seemed in the soft air to dwell,
Incomparably indwelling, selfless and whole,
Without action, away from world's suffering.
And I was stolen in a trance
Of the pagoda like a jewel in ancient, shimmering air,
And of the mild-eyed Chinese recumbent after smoking,
Mysterious inducements of the suffusing scene.

In the East contemplation is a self-annihilation,
In the West it never escapes from intrusive action.

IV. REALITY

The tail, the waist, the nose turret or the ball gunner,
Using the sight with the floating reticle,
Has only, if his work is properly done,
Has only to press the trigger. The enemy explodes in the air.
It is all so fast sometimes
Neither pilot nor gunner can see the result,

Until, far up and away
Banking over, high above the blue ocean
They glimpse far below pieces of plane
Drift idly, suspended in the air.
But reality is there.
Death is the reality in this case,
Love is the reality of St. Theresa,
Identification is the reality of Boehme,
For Blake innocence and experience
Were indistinguishable in mystical affinity,
Our enemy pilot was dead by a death-dealing pounce
Of superior machinery and superior manœuvre and aim—
But what Chance was there!—
For in battle, as if man were made of adrenalin
There is no time for fear or fault, for faith or fame
But pilots say it is all like a football game.
Back on the carrier their hearts may pound,
After the event, when significance comes,
But up in the air intense and free
Controlled and able,
Perfectly secure,
What is the end of a man
You never saw before,
You never see?

It is the end of this man whose life yours never touched,
Of whose existence you never knew,
Young man, young man,
Whose floating corpse you will never view,
Whose friends you also slew,
It is the end of this man,
Or let us say it is the end of Man
Christ shed His blood for,
He shed His blood for you.

He knew you, savage trickster,
Your accomplished guile,
The total ignorance of your intelligent blasphemy,
The evil that is ineradicable
He died to show.

He would redeem the enemy airman's blood-muffled scream,
He would redeem the pride of your indifferent victory.

Is there any doubt that Christ was the most æsthetic man?
As æstheticism is a part of philosophy,
Philosophy a part of life,
Life action, for even the Nirvana-seeker still breathes,
And Stylites pulls up food in a basket,
So Christ contemplated the ultimate origin,
But originated the ultimate rules of action.
All things are interlocked, interlaced,
Interinvolved, interdenominated.
The pilot who pinched himself in his bomber,
Because only a year ago he was a boy in school,
Hardly realizing the magnitude of his change,
Was only one of a squadron,
A flying integer in a welter of heterogeneity.
Christ belonged to the Jewish race
But Chinese and Japanese speak to Him now.

The poet is a man of sense
Who handles the brightness of the air,
The viewless tittles he dandles,
Timelessness is his everywhere.

His blood is in the rose he contemplates
The blood of the rose reddens in his mind,
The poet is master of presences,
He is the insight of the blind.

Poetry is so mad and so kind
It is so majestic an inventive surprise,
Is it any wonder that in it
The spirit of man arise?

ALAN ROOK

Seafarer

O sweet recorder of virtue at whose bidding
waves and tides grow stagnant and the sea
bows to the song-girt keel. O my sorrowing
landscape, link and light of memory.

When shall waves on rocks and undulations
of water break and surrender to the shore?
When shall the rocks decline, or their foundations
tremble and sing? O when? For ever more

ripples and waves and tides descend upon them—
o beautiful white doves o endless good!
—etching the seabed's fertile rise and fall.

When shall ocean's descant be our anthem
here choreography be understood
only in terms of rock and genital.

PAUL DEHN

New Age

To-night the wind comes screaming up the road
Like a train in the tube. Over my cringing head
Gas-lamps are ghosts of the still-marching Dead
Whose butchered eyes, blown open,
Pity our cold condition.
Here, in this rotting air,
The traffic lights ripen
From green to yellow, from yellow to red;
And I, with a cobweb of rain in my hair,
Trudge between tram-lines, seeking a world's salvation.

Only the lost are with me, only the late
And the last, lonely stragglers in the street:
A drunkard in the lamplight, on whose coat
Something still glistens;
The frosted whore who marks
My footfall on the stone,
Sniffs in the wind and listens
Under the red lamp of the traffic light;
And a flash boy, adrift in the pin-stripe rain,
Edging towards the privacy of parks.

These, my cold company; whose nailed feet
Scrape on the pavements of eternal night;
The down-at-heel who drift, in the wet light,
Seeking a wind to blow
The spent leaf from its stalk;
Who long for death,
As the leaf longs for snow.
These only are unafraid, who throng to meet
The wind that bears a world's end in its breath.
O Christ have pity on them, where they walk.

Raise Your nailed hand! Unwedge the window-frame
Of the sleek man in bed. Shiver the dream
That muffles his drugged ear to the crack of doom
And let him hear the shriek
Of the relentless wind
And the loose casement, rattling.
Listen. The clocks strike,
Heard by the lost; unheard in the locked room
Under the sheet where the sly hands go shuttling,
This night and evermore, world without end.

GEORGE REAVEY

Arctic Requiem

Where he lies sleeping icebergs whet
The edging tides, down under thunder
Numb cries his head to where suns set
Or, seldom cocksure, try and sunder

Night wool-embedded from drugged day,
And yonder drifts his icy crown:
So sleeps in nature, as a lover may
Be gulfed and drowsed in gratitude,

So thankful for white-starred indulgence,
All passion spent, and care, his black
Thoughts burnished to a new effulgence,
His anguish fused in that pearl furnace.

Immured in ocean's jar by rift
Of lightning, time's own wrecking kiss:
And now in calm forever sift
The eyeless spawn of snow-bound stars.

GEOFFREY PARSONS

Asylum

Others I saw who were sufficient terror;
There was the man who screamed,
Who filled the air with agony, like a tortured horse,
Relapsed and sat quite still
As if he dreamed,
Then swiftly once again clapped hands to ears
As half a moment's accumulated fears
Punctured the silence with their shrill
And mandrake utterance.

One searched my pockets
Looking for death the elusive, the desired:

Death was, he said,
A matchstick with a purple head.
Once he had found it, wars would cease,
Men's hearts would by its flame be fired
To seek the sanity of peace:
Death was a dainty, death should be enticed.
Another said: 'Behold, I am the Christ.'

There were so many.
Furtive, fugitive eyes,
And crooked lips, parted
In the staccato whisper of confidence.
The mind smarted,
Caught in the timeless orbit
Of each sad, salt and solitary world,
Which, self-created, stranger to surprise,
Through hostile, hope-dissolving darkness whirled

Like conspirators they came
To sigh their sibilant tales of persecution.
One was the pope: she made me cardinal
And blessed me as she uttered absolution,
They shrieked: 'Break down the bars and let me go'.
Another slyly said: 'X is my name;
The quantity that wise men do not know'.
A bearded third, embraced me on each cheek,
Hopped three times round me like a bird,
But did not speak.

Some there were,
Stabbed to their own still centre,
Whose inturned consciousness
I could not enter.
Others, as though I were a guest
Or friend in normal traffic met,
Observed the wind came from the west,
Or offered casually a cigarette.

Yet each within his eyes' mirror
Reflected incommunicable horror;
Each with his sensitive eyes searched
A private world where happiness was parched;

Each behind his suffering eyes wore
A twisted brain that formed a web to snare
One fearful thought alone, and only know
That fearful thought, and never let it go.

This was no scene for pity
Pity was spent too soon
Pity was bankrupt;
Sympathy out of tune.

All these I saw who were sufficient terror,
And there but for the grace of God go I
The mind's reckoning:
Yet always I the observer
Screened from each private error,
Barred from their brotherhood
Despite their beckoning.

But there is one who stays,
Following my action with her absent eyes,
Who crooks an articulate and compulsive finger:
Why should she linger
This side my sight's horizon?

Her face was grey,
There were traces of dung about her lips;
The curling hairs on her chin
Were bathed in discoloured spittle
She was chewing some wisps of hair;
She wore a grin.
Blood from her scalp dripped;
Now and again she caught it on her tongue.
One withered dug escaped her filthy dress;
It made me sick to think some child
Once nuzzled up to suck at that repugnance,
Against that source of sustenance defiled
To hug and press.

Then, like a fool, I spoke.
Tossed in the vacuum some meaningless word,
Knowing to expect an answer were absurd.

The creature gave a wincing shudder,
Spat out a half-chewed wisp of hair,
Grimaced, cackled,
And cocked at me one ear:
Then madness woke
And whimpered, 'I'm not here.'

That was the moment of reason's abdication;
Some secret region of my brain betrayed me
And for an unguessed time
I shared that crazy world of her creation.
Some part of time,
Meekly acknowledging kinship,
Sanity out of sight,
I was alive in her imagination,
Conscious alone of the pulsing of her delight
Who could believe,
Though this no Eden, I
An Adam to her solitary Eve.

Return of reason
Was slow as the thawing of limbs.
I was aware of the stink of death,
Of the body's resistance to dissolving earth:
I had had my season
And now endured the pain of my return
Like some fresh birth.
I had breathed her breath,
Been passive to her power,
And now, though I was freed,
I know that in me lives that seed
She brought to momentary flower.

And so does she remain,
A crumpled creature in a darkened room
Filling my mind's vision with wide, absent eyes.
If once I acquiesced and understood,
Why should that crooked seed not sprout again
That false flower bloom
And I be seized into her sisterhood
And stay with her for good?

JULIAN ORDE

The Flying Child

Constructed of feathers and fishes' bones
The kicked-over castles were drifts of dust
That the children left when the whistle blew
In the Luxembourg Gardens, long ago.
And when, with a caught moth terrifying
My fingers and thumbs, I rose and flew
Out of the locked gates and the park,
In people's houses they found it tea-time;
But the convict moth opposed a midnight.

A thief in despair, my hands were stones,
And nothing so feeling as membrane moth
(Presented to pain down a thousand hairs)
Had ever cruelly crashed in the dark;
And nothing so brittle and insect eye-lashed
Had crackled and fluttered in such a den.
(No voice it had, to print in the air
A crippled copy of harm and hurt.
That was the worst, the loneliest thought.)

It began to grow. So terrified then
Was my den of hands that could not know
If they should be broken or tarnished moth
Stain on them always à dusty death,
That I came to the ground in an avenue,
And opened my thumbs, and stopped the clap
Of wings, by holding them, skin to skin.
Then in full cry I went blazing back
To the hunting place in the evening park
To give to the wind its moth and kin.

Empty the Luxembourg garden of all
But its skeleton self, with a sigh breathing
Through railing and rattling laurel leaves
And urn and wind-washed stone and tall
Triangular trees and other trees.
Where five grey castles stood before,

Round the iron-clawed seats were deeper drifts,
Arrowed with fish-bone, horned with twig,
To screech a shoe on the glass and grit,
On a button that opened a castle door.

A multiplication of pain—the moth.
I saw the generations lying
Between its wings. I peeled one off
And watched it meet and change the sky
With a bird's breast, with a life forgiven,
Black as a whistle, out of a deathbed.
And into birds they all were startled,
Till the ruffed and feathered air was shaken,
And with bird brows my head was circled.

Then the last moth fell, soft-bodied, fœtal,
Flopped to the gravel; became a cat.
The garden ground crept forward with it,
It dragged the night behind its heel,
And wildest bird could not migrate from that.

On Looking Out

A mushroom morning and a day for kites,
And the ricksha boys bickering in China,
And myself in the middle of the middle ring,
(But everyone else thinks they are);
And a skyscape just arrived, with quite
Its best and inrepeatable design, a
Water-land built solid out of nothing,
And beautiful as my imagined China.

GWENDOLEN FREEMAN

Ghost's Answer

If you ask the ghost of the dead who haunts behind
Your thoughts why he's not stronger in your mind,
Why he does not greet you as a human being
As in old days with all the peace of seeing,
He may reply, 'I regret to be half lost,
But come as I can. It is you who are the ghost.'

Two and Nothing

Here in the glare of electric light and a thousand faces,
Under London, the roar of the train, oppressed
By the discontents of the day, the pride pricked,
Living's humiliation, I find rest

In this, in this thought: I am two. This pinned and angry creature
I bear with me is near but not very near,
As distant from me, the watcher, as those faces.
I can withdraw. I can analyse each scar,

Judge the self-love, the strain: smile almost as I would
At the hurts and bitterness of those who sit
In the rattling glow beside me. This is peace
To survey my raging self from my own height.

But now I emerge. Here are gardens, spring and a shower of pink
And yellow over the fences, and I who was
So split, so two, am one again. No: farther
Than one, unaware of self at all. All eyes.

ERIC NIXON

Poem

O wing white blossom of snow
seeding in a wind of woven love
pearl perfect in the sea of night
fabric of mothwing and sacred woe,
dream with the swans and the water
how in the water is death and tainted blood
cross fire and grave
stardew and suicide
dreams and the death of dreams
pale ghosts in the veins of streams
dark love in the suck of the tide.

DEREK STANFORD

Myth at Chairmorton

Dim-clouded May,
behind your mask of blossom
over which sunlight ripples and shadows pass,
I glimpse again those haunted golden features,
by time half-hidden
and by time betrayed.

That year the fields
seemed over-drugged with pollen;
a smoke-screen silence brooded on the woods;
the drowsy roads inscribed their endless questions,
paused in the heated haze
and disappeared.

There, trapped in spell-bound
mazes of the summer,
lost and distraught in labyrinths of green
we wandered copse and thicket, marsh and meadow
somnambulists who sought
some dreamt-of scene.

Never a rainbow
swung its coloured sign-post
over our path to point us east or west,
never a church spire marked this mapless landscape.
never a single traveller
crossed our track.

We were alone.
The air without an echo—
empty of cuckoo's call or twitter of lark—
danced all about us in its web of brightness
under the sky's
profound delphinium vault.

And so we journeyed:
bare-legged and bare-footed,
burned by the sun, feet pierced with thorn and stone,
stopping to sip the wine of sultry kisses
and swallow down
the bitter bread of love.

At last, worn-out
by mutual protestation,
ravaged and scourged by jealousy and doubt,
we came, towards the pale approach of evening,
upon that place
appointed at the start.

We spoke no word.
From balconies of chestnut
the scented candles of the summer shone.
Tier after tier, they reared their bowers of whiteness
above the shadows
battening on the ground.

I clasped your hand.
The world of open daylight
divided as we stepped between the trees.
Half-darkness like a moss-grown weir engulfed us.
Our blindfold search had
all but reached its close.

Enmeshed with ivy,
thick with dock and nettle,
right at the tangled centre of the wood,
a door whose rusty hinges raped the stillness
led downwards to a
subterranean lake.

I felt your sad
and heavy gaze upon me,
I saw the dark green water's secret smile,
I locked my throbbing eyes against your beauty,
and hurled you from
the stairway where we stood.

So ended love.
The lake's convulsive mirror
conveyed, through swirling weeds, your tortured stare.
All my bright days sank drowned with you forever,
and hope died strangled
in your streaming hair.

Now, when the hawthorn
showers its cool confetti
to bless the earth where summer weds with spring,
down shafts of dreams I come again to join you
and seal our parted sleep
with death's gold ring.

GLORIA KOMAI

The Persian Kiss

Corner the Persian rose; never despair
Of gardens; rather touch the wall between
Perfume and image than a thief.

Better a pilgrim on the heart's highway
Pursuing distance as a dragonfly
Than be to one the rose that never was.

BRIAN GILES

Sleeping Woman

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly
multiply thy sorrow and thy conception.

This one who storms my false world
With the clenched fist of lust and anger
Raised in the face of the black gale's danger
Lies now like the sleeping fœtus curled:

Who walks in anguish between despair and despair
Where the grieving and sexual angel weeps,
This one lies, safe in the truce of the mortal, sleeps
And has forgotten what the waking hear:

And has forgotten how the rule was broken
And why the grieving angel holds a sword
And what followed when the words were spoken
That could be answered only by the Word.

Whose knowledge chills the anguished and the wise,
Oblivious, wholly beloved this condemned one lies.

Spring

In Spring shall you peel a green strip
And the bark torn from the white and naked wood
The mind will bring its image of a green girl raped
And the beast-legged god whose knowledge was his lust,
Who took the horror of her knowledge for his own
And chastely in her vision clothed his lust,
More than a maidenhead taken and possessed.

In Spring did you not see her come, she who lay
All winter at the icebound snowfield's narrow heart?
See her step from the last thin snowdrift,
Trembling at the small wind that nuzzled at her breasts,
And wonderingly touch the hawthorn into leaf—
She for whom the small flowers blossomed at her feet,
Delicately white, as for a victim?

Because her sleeping body whitely lies . . .

Because her sleeping body whitely lies
Like a young and naked tree that grows
Behind my dreams, there is no day denies

The tongueless mouth that like a white rose
Lies open in the midnight of her thighs.
Because her sleeping body whitely lies,

I think how a man dives, a ripple shows
And quietly on his head the waters close.
Behind my dreams there is no day denies

The hidden wish these images disclose:
That she's my gentle Death, those seas the rose,
Because her sleeping body whitely lies
Behind my dreams, there is no day denies.

JOHN ZADEK

Slum Song

Sit silent in your coffin,
Whose wafer walls quiver
With gaudy trumpets crying;
And see the severed sun
Mirror the eyes of blind beggars,
Frosted with isolation lying.

Sleep then with the poet star-like
And let the web of dreams enfold
Your mind in black hypnotic cyphers;

Let the long fingers shed their tears
Of light like fountains weeping
Into the darkness of the lifeless.

Poem

My love is such
A private shrine,
Sprayed with the silver
Flames that live
In spite of flesh;
And cast in spells of secrets:
Shrouds of time.

Even that mind's
Outer eye, blended
Of tears, must peer
As round a leaning
Door; seeing the
Stilted sanity of words
And syllables suspended.

JAMES KIRKUP

The Snowman

For Cecil Collins

Over the raised lawn
wanders the phantom of snow.
The man the children made
grown to a giant, strides
into the mountainside, at a touch
tipping the snow-scale of the winter leaf.
But at dawn again he is laid asleep
full-length in the red-walled yard.

One child comes early to rouse
out of his bed the simple guest,
but at his great head, icicle-crowned,
kneels, and pillows his own on his breast.
Till at the first shrill sound
of spring he is gone,
leaving a vanished crown,
and a child alone.

PETER JACKSON

'Worked in the Theme . . .'

Worked in the theme of a fanatical
Delight, a white-
Hot, red-hot belief: in the dusty
Sinful fabric of the turning tomb:
Drawn from the torn
And threadbare texture of the night:

Timid in the drooping bed of fear:
Massive in the passive
Role of ageless lust: gaunt and dim
With an unsexed vagueness that drains
The loin: the coin
The womb rejects with peevish hate.

Mood that never fears the good-
Will of the still
Untempered flesh: flesh that never feels
The dullness of the form or the patient
Growth of both
Instrument once end, the furnace and the flame.

MAX JACOB

Broken Old World

Under the headlands of the past, ocean without shore
I contemplate a love borne off by the winds
The fugitive troops of the night of my age
Disappear. My eyes are the lamps of time

Memorial lands, my fortunate isles!
Seignorial delight, majestic calm!
The fast horses of my green years
Have not tired my heart with the noise of their hoofs

I have woven, I have woven with winds and words
A sail with a long grey neck held by sins
To hide the Acropolis of my last portal
And tends a plumed helmet towards the sun

Are you hungry for earth? do you dream of kingdoms?
Would you change skin, country or colour?
The furies incline to remove my helmet
The iron of their kiss will cicatrise my heart

A sad and calm wind unknown under the stars
Which came from no cardinal horizons
Stretched the low day of disaster across the gulf
The old world is broken, let the vessels be ready.

Translated by THOMAS GOOD)

JEAN VAGNE

Token

This sunlight in the mouth, this shining syllable,
is like a sonorous flower at the source of the world,
watered by early springs in ancient valleys.

And round my love I hear the darkness beating:
no sound save that of a word which leaves my lips
to seek you out in the simple game of desire.
Roving one, hidden between three walls of shadow,
among the flight of the dead and the birth of children.
unveil your eyes and the lands which lie within them
far from my love which makes them what they are.

Under the spreading sun the world wakes happy,
lips blossom like a bird upon the roof,
from every roof-top smoke unfolds its blossom
tinged with the dizzy scent of the season's fruit.

(Translated by DEREK STANFORD)

GEORG TRAKL

Birth

Mountains: blackness, silence and snow.
Red from the wood descends the hunt;
O the mossy eyes of the deer.

Stillness of the mother; under black-held pines
Open out the sleeping hands
When decayed the cold moon appears.

O the birth of man. Nocturnal rush
Of blue waters in the cleft of the rock:
Sighing regards his image the fallen angel,

Awakes paleness in a gloomy room.
As two moons
The eyes of the stony ancient aglow.

Woe, the birthgiving wail. With black wing
The boy's temples bestir the night,
Snow which soft from a purple cloud sinks.

(Translated by ERNST SIGLER)

We regret that the name of the translator, J. M. COHEN, of the poem by Manuel Altolaguirre in our last issue was omitted.—*Editor.*

THE POETRY OF ALEX COMFORT

Some years ago—I believe it was in 1943—Alex Comfort wrote an essay which, to my mind, marked the acknowledgment of a new social awareness in English poetry. The Marxism to which poets had been addicted during the 1930's had shown itself clearly to be the servant of a totalitarian view of life which was inimical to creative writing of any value. The result of realizing this fact was a subsequent tendency among poets to retreat into Anderson shelters of private emotion, until the sheer pressure of events forced them out to accept another kind of social attitude or sink into effete preciosity. Auden, an ex-Marxist himself expressed it vaguely: 'We must love one another or die,' but Comfort in this important essay laid open and stated in memorable terms the issues which confront poets to-day. I do not propose to discuss this essay at length—it will in any case be republished shortly in the volume entitled *Art and Social Responsibility*—but there are certain short passages which deserve to be quoted as an introduction to the consideration of Comfort's poetry.

The essay begins with a reconsideration of the old classic—romantic opposition in the new context of contemporary English letters. Comfort says:

'We have just passed through a period of classicism in English poetry which has no parallel in American work, except where that work has felt the influence of English writers, and we have seen a few of its limitations. History has driven us from classicism to romanticism, and the migration has been almost universal among sensitive writers.

'These terms, classic and romantic, stand for more than difference of style. The classic sees man as master and the romantic as victim of his environment. That seems to me to be the real difference. I regard the periods of English literature as an alternation between these two concepts. It is as if the awareness of death, the factor which, at root, determines the degree to which we feel masters of our circumstances, ebbed and flowed, alternately emphasized and obscured as a factor in interpretative art.'

Comfort identifies himself with the romantic movement, the movement of those writers who are aware of the omnipresence of death, and who react against the evil existing in the destructive impulses of modern society. Of the new social attitude among poets he states:

'Therefore now politically we regard ourselves as absolved. The State has consistently shown itself to be evil, in so far as we are able to understand evil. It has absolved us by rejecting individuality, to which as artists we are obliged to cling, even though in retaining it we are forced to face the reality of personal death, the bitterest thought that any interpretive mind can face. We now accept no responsibility to any group, only to individuals. There are no corporate allegiances. All our politics are atomized.

'It is not that as artists we have deserted society. It has deserted or ejected us, and we live on in contrast with it as tenants whom the landlord has not troubled to have thrown out. We have not seceded, but in clinging to personality we cling to something which everyone knows is the harbinger of death. They hate us for reminding them of it. They burrow deeper into society to lose sight of the fact which towers over them. Rather than face it, they become insane. This is the world in which our art is placed. Fascism is a refuge from Death in death. And Fascism epitomizes society.'

In the remainder of this essay Comfort goes on to analyse the insane totalitarian or semi-totalitarian order, based on war and death, in which the modern poet is placed, and to formulate a doctrine of Disobedience to the State as the means of social regeneration. It is the artist's function to protest continually, to act as a mouthpiece for the submerged people of our society. 'We recognize boundless responsibility to men,' he says, 'especially to all those who are deprived of their voices, but ultimately to all men, since they will in time become silent.' And again, 'An artistic responsibility consists in taking all this upon our shoulders—in providing voices for all those who have not voices.'

I have quoted this essay at length, because the issues it raises are echoed continually in Comfort's poetry, and are here expressed by the poet in a clear manner which leaves us no doubt as to his intention. There are poets in whose work poetry and pronouncements on social theory may have no evident connection. Comfort has none of this schizoid character. His social ideas and his conviction of the tragedy of human life in our present age dominate the thought of his poems and even influence his style and technique. First pity, then indignation, become the leading themes of his work, and he writes of the condition of man with an earnestness that loads all his verses with purpose and makes him incapable of lightness and often even of true irony. There is no element of self-mockery in his work; he is so wholeheartedly concerned with his opposition to an evil

social order that his voice sometimes—and particularly in his recent verse—rises into stridency; occasionally he almost tub-thumps for the cause of freedom.

In Comfort's early poems it is the perpetual consciousness of death, and of death in life, that is most evident. Significantly, his early volumes are called *A Wreath for the Living* and *Elegies*, while a large number of the individual poems in each book are concerned primarily with death and human misery, the living death. In *A Wreath for the Living*, this concern is almost passive, expressed in a vast pity for the victims, a consciousness of the multitudinous tragedies to which men and women at every moment and in all places are falling. He says:

> *Now that I know this forest is my hand,*
> *the wolf's call in the night, the bird's black feather*
> *I fear among its terrible leaves to find*
> *the leaf of pity in the herbs I gather.*

And later, in the same moving poem, 'Elegy for a Girl Dead in an Air-Raid,' he brings together the sad variety of human tragedy in a few telling lines:

> *Lady, under this tree I kiss your hands*
> *knowing your tree to be the Spanish olive,*
> *for you and I remember the sun on metal*
> *and fifteen bodies scattered across a road—*
>
> *you and I remember broken walls*
> *and who but drowned Ophelia counts the bubbles*
> *when one ship sank, some way outside the Deziertas*
> *fists pounding her plates as the fishes gathered?*
>
> *For nobody falls but we two hear the shot—*
> *no one is beaten but we see the blood,*
> *and the pale hand uncurl in the green water—*
> *or hear the miner's spine crack two miles down*

Occasionally, as in the 'Letter to a Friend in the Army', the mood moves beyond mere pity for human suffering to a denunciatory anger against the authors of man's misery.

> *. . . We two know the dice*
> *loaded, and the people*
> *the only sure losers.*

We have watched the cards stacking, the dignified flag
with pockets, all the rhetoric and posters—
the holes in the table, where
corpses and promises vanish.

But such a mood is not yet frequent, and in this early book some of the best poems are those not concerned directly with the omnipresence of death, poems such as 'The Atoll of the Mind', where a series of delicately balanced and executed images grows into an uncommonly penetrating representation of human consciousness.

Out of what calms and pools the cool shell grows
dumb teeth under clear water, where no currents
fracture the coral's porous horn
grows up the mind's stone tree, the honeycomb,
the plump brain-coral breaking the pool's mirror,
the ebony antler, the cold sugared fan.

All these strange trees stand downward through the water,
the mind's grey candied points tend to the surface—
the greater part is out of sight below:

but when on the island's whaleback spring green blades,
new land on water wavers, birds bring seeds
and tides plant slender trunks by the lagoon

I see the image of the mind's two trees cast downward,
one tilting leaves to catch the sun's bright pennies,
one dark as water, its root among the bones.

In this poem appear most boldly the characteristics which are important in Comfort's work. The images are clear and telling, building up with an almost organic strength to the last startling shift of metaphor—'the sun's bright pennies' and 'its root among the bones'. The lines are full and echoing, and the words have a natural and emotively powerful cohesion. There is an almost incantatory dignity in the strong rhythm which is characteristic of Comfort's verse—the lightly musical line hardly ever appears in his poems and, where it does, is rarely successful. The absence of open rhyme strengthens the internal echoes within the poem; the technique is never obvious, and the poem is impelled by an emotional impetus and a sincerity that enhance the bold intellectual concept underlying it.

Here are also evident certain of Comfort's predilections in the choice of imagery. Images from both natural history and anatomy are frequent among his poems, and these are attributable partly to a childhood concern for natural phenomena, and partly to a medical training which has enhanced his interest in biology.

Usually the nature images are themselves woven dexterously into the meaning of the poem, as in 'Letter from Safety':

> *But what of yourself? The childs' fists of bracken*
> *will be rising before your letter, and green*
> *eggs be laid in the hedgerow. Look, the earth*
> *lies and continues to hope, and the symbol of hope*
> *is laid in the hedges. But here are the weasel's prints*
> *crossing the snow, and those small feet*
> *cross our two minds who watch such different stars*
> *and prowling under the nest make us two cling together.*

Here the hope of young bracken shoots, and the fearfulness of that particularly evil little animal, the weasel, are embodied in the wider concepts of human hope and fear which form the dominant contrasting themes of this poem.

Elsewhere, though rarely, the nature images stand in their own completeness, as in these lines:

> *Those family birches, set upon a down*
> *polished like furniture, the red bark lipped—*
> *from the shoulder-high young to puberty, whose hands*
> *rattle together crossed upon the cloud—*
>
> *beget a shadow in summer, are jealously guarded*
> *by ranks of nettles, over the chalk-pit's navel*
> *a landmark for the downs—have carpeted*
> *over some years a covert with dry leaves . . .*

But even here the rounded picture of the birch trees gains its wider significance by being set in the main nostalgic theme of the poem. Comfort never writes 'pure' nature poetry; his botanic images are always instinct with that almost mystical awareness of the unity of natural phenomena, the interconnection of the lives and deaths of trees and men, which belongs to truly romantic poetry.

The concern with anatomy is connected with a certain macabre tendency in some of the poems. Comfort is vividly aware of the bone, symbol of death, beneath the skin of man, and this idea is well

expressed in 'Elegy on a Hill', where 'the bone sings in the dark furrow' and mocks the unthinking confidence of man. Here the anatomical imagery is admirably used. On other occasions, I feel, there is an unnecessary display of specialist knowledge, as in 'the butchers chop at the æpyornis bone'. Those who have not studied anatomy may well wonder what is the particular poetic significance of this oddly-named bone.

Comfort's second volume, *Elegies*, is inspired by the same concepts of death and pity that dominate *A Wreath for the Living* The feeling of doom settles even more deeply over the poems; we are told that 'love is not strong to fight with history', and in the 'First Elegy' death comes even more portentously into the poet's vision:

> *. . . we learn now the lesson of all living is death.*
> *Perpetual death, that falls on the single leaf*
> *perpetual darkness, end of flower and thought,*
> *perennial country, where we are going, whither*
> *all winds blow, all lives tend, all leaves fall,*
> *to the blind attic full of broken faces*
> *under the cold and heavy muzzle of the years.*
> *Locked in this truth how youth is frozen—sharp*
> *as the winter's crystals, closing round long reeds.*

These poems have a meditative solemnity, reflected in the slow beat of the lines and the almost monotonous sadness of the imagery. At times a religious intensity is approached in this preoccupation with death overshadowing our world; rich yet crumbling conceits arise from the body of the verse in a manner reminiscent of the Metaphysicals, as in this verse from 'Fifth Elegy', describing the faces of old men sitting on benches:

> *The furrows of these faces map in autumn*
> *unknown countries, the hills and paths of the dead.*
> *It is the hunters' land, whose mossy heads*
> *lie round the springs, and drink in deepest valleys*
> *the perpetual green water, the spinning grains of the brook.*

Here is a continuity of thought, supported by contrasting yet logically consistent images, similar to that which was so striking in 'The Atoll of the Mind'.

In general, *Elegies* represents no significant departure from the earlier poems. In a larger style, in a more thoughtful mood, it repeats the same preoccupations as its predecessors.

But in Comfort's most recent volume, *The Signal to Engage*, there is a very evident change in approach and style. This is shown immediately in the title of the book, which signifies a turning from the acceptance and contemplation of death as an inevitable factor to a consideration of the ways in which death can be kept in its true place and man can be freed from the death in life which he endures to-day. I imagine that all these poems were written after or at the same time as the essay which I quoted at the beginning of this article, for, in so far as they teach any lesson, it is that contained therein. Put in crude terms, Comfort's message is that, if we would be saved we must refuse obedience to the forces of death, *i.e.* all who put themselves in authority over us and demand our allegiance in the name of the state. It is significant that a whole section of the book is dedicated to four anarchists who were in prison at the end of the war for incitement to disaffection and similar 'offences', and that one individual poem is a 'Song for John Hewetson', one of these four men.

These poems are only rarely of meditation or observation. Comfort has passed beyond that to the preaching of revolt. He says:

This daylight
shows us our enemies, who then stand back.
To-day we join the battle in full day.

And in such poems as 'Song of the Heroes' speaks his doctrine of disobedience in simple terms that remind us of Wilfred Owen:

I wonder sometimes if the soldiers lying
under the soil, wrapped in their coats like beggars
sleeping under an arch, their hands filled with leaves

could take vengeance for once on the men who sent them,
coming back like beggars, seeing the homes and fields
that their obedience lost to them, the men of all countries

whether they would have anything to say
as ghosts at frosty windows to sons or brothers
other than this—'Obedience is death—

If you are willing to die, then choose obedience'.

The content of such poems is patently inspired, partly by Giono, a writer in whom Comfort is very interested, and partly by a contact

with anarchist thought that has grown steadily during the past few years. Comfort has become a militant rather than a detached observer; it is not accidental that the pieces in this volume are called *Songs* instead of *Elegies*, or that the lines are less full and the rhythm more staccato.

This change in outlook has, of course, had a general effect on the structure of the poems and, to my mind, has proved initially rather a disintegrating influence. I say this reluctantly, because I identify myself wholly with the ideas which Comfort puts forward in these late poems. Nevertheless, from a literary point of view I think the work in 'Signal to Engage' is as a whole less homogenous and satisfying than that in the previous books. There is a tendency towards abstraction which is all the more unfortunate because Comfort's great power as a poet lies in his ability to create really living and concrete imagery. Telling images are still there in plenty, but we are also faced with passages in which political concepts, complete with capital letters, are combined into a somewhat unsatisfying kind of oratory:

> *. . . There will rise then a sea, spring then a voice*
> *that will outtop the heads of Citizens, and its noise*
> *at that cloud's hem clinging we listen for.*
>
> *For Freedom and Beauty are not fixed stars,*
> *but cut by man only from his own flesh*
> *but lit by man, only for his sojourn*
>
> *because our shout into the cup of sky*
> *brings back no echo, brings back no echo ever:*
> *because man's mind lives at his stature's length*
>
> *because the stars have for us no earnest of winning*
> *because there is no resurrection*
> *because all things are against us, we are ourselves.*

In the tone of many of these poems there enters a stridency which is not always effective, and there is also an occasional disjointedness, expressed in the broken rhythms of the lines and a tendency of the images to cohere less inevitably than in the earlier poems.

Nevertheless, these signs of restlessness, of a mood of transition, apply only to some poems, and signify no lessening of Comfort's power as a writer. I should say they indicate rather that he has not

yet sufficiently assimilated his ideological development to make it a wholly satisfactory subject for poetical expression. There are still, in this new book, many poems in which Comfort speaks in his more personal style, such as 'I saw a woman in a green field', 'And Lazarus brings the Autumn's foot of flame,' and 'At a Meeting in a Garden,' in which occur these beautiful lines:

All round
the pattern of history lies from sky to sky
the darkling map where our hill's shadow moves
and on its gnomon stand our own shadows.
The impassable stream lies like a noiseless smoke,
the roadless forest like the pile of cloth,
and clustered in the darkness, field on field
waits the familiar country under us
in an unmoving sleep of distance lying.

It seems to me that perhaps Comfort's mood of defiance finds best expression in his satirical pieces, which he does not choose to publish in these volumes but which deserve one day to be collected, and in such poems of quiet, deliberate bitterness as 'Notes to My Son', in which the spirit of rebellion is most vividly expressed:

Remember when you hear them beginning to say Freedom
Look carefully—see who it is that they want you to butcher.

Remember, when you say that the old trick would not have
fooled you for a moment
That every time it is the trick which seems new.

Remember that you will have to put in irons
Your better nature, if it will desert to them. . . .

These, then, are the characteristics of Comfort's poetry: a deep consciousness of death, passing through a rooted sense of natural unity into an ideology of rebellion and disobedience; a power of concrete imagery made more effective by an ability to integrate the images into a cumulative series depending on the final shock of an inevitable contrast; a meditative dignity of utterance and an internal discipline which replace to a great extent the external application of an obvious technique. At times these characteristics pull in opposite directions—the rebellious urge provokes a desire for rhetoric or strident anger, which are not wholly expressible in

Comfort's personal style of writing. Nevertheless, I am convinced that this conflict will diminish by a gradual emergence of a new style, for, however necessary these criticisms may be, Comfort is still writing poetry which makes him one of the few important poets who have emerged in England since 1939.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

WIDE BOY AND SCHOLAR

A. S. J. TESSIMOND, *Voices in a Giant City* (Heinemann, 6s.); JOHN HEATH-STUBBS, *The Divided Ways* (Routledge, 5s.).

Mr. Tessimond is the 'wide boy' amongst contemporary poets, the metropolitan who sees life from the inside, with its forgeries, deceptions, sentiment, fear, but who is not taken in by any of its attributes. He is both the neurotic and the psychiatrist:

> *We are the double people, gaoled and gaoler,*
> *Sparrow and hawk in one uneasy body;*
> *We are a battlefield but cannot clearly*
> *Remember why the fight or when it started.*

But the fight is always present. Mr. Tessimond's poetry has the same milieu as the novels of Graham Greene; it shows the same excitement at the underworld glitter of big cities, the same consciousness of evil, of hidden realities, of undeveloped passions—only there is not the sense of sin in its religious aspect, nor any final expiation in confession. The 'I' of Mr. Tessimond's poetry is not only himself, but the sensitive and insecure man whose ubiquity and anonymity characterize the position of the poet in the modern world—or rather of the poet manqué:

> *Blind in my mask and tripped by my disguises;*
> *Used by my tools and wounded by my weapons;*
> *Chased by my echo, scared by my long shadow;*
> *Fumbling with delicate hands; longing to be*
> *Myself (who? who? but who? if I only knew!).*

Here is the problem, exactly stated, of the misfits without real identity, of which society is largely compounded. Mr. Tessimond is aware that a generality in only a very small way represents the

inharmonious elements which give it character. The popular concept of a thing *in general* has hardly any defined relation to the multiplicity of various cells which form it. Thus in each definition Mr. Tessimond gives—*The British, The Lesser Artists, The Prostitute*—there is a corollary to each statement, and in the end the direct opposite to what *appears* to be taking place, actually happens—as, for instance, in the *Popular Press:*

> *I am the mirror where your image moves,*
> *Neat and obedient twin, until one day*
> *It moves before you move; and it is you*
> *Who have to ape its moods and motions, who*
> *Must now obey.*

The scope of Mr. Tessimond's poetry is rarely widened beyond the confines of city life, with its properties of radio, saloon bars, money, advertising, smart boys, intellectuals, dance bands—these are all titles of poems—but within its range it affords as complete a study, as discerning an analysis, of the social characteristics of modern life and of London in particular, as any poetry now being written. Mr. Tessimond is rarely personal or emotional, and he hardly ever intrudes upon the anonymous personality he has projected. He is content to observe, to characterise, and, with a fine show of tricks, to collapse illusions. It is inevitable that after a bit, a certain monotony creeps into his approach, as he is attacking the same subject the whole time; it is inevitable, too, that such epitaphs as 'slick', 'Audenish,' 'professional' occur to one in reading these poems, for they are all that, in an extremely accomplished performance by a poetic sleight-of-hand expert. Yet their virtues are great, for they all succeed individually as poems, they are beautifully finished and modulated in a minor range of keys, and each time one feels that they hit the nail on the head. Mr. Tessimond is an analyst and a craftsman first, a lyricist second. But he never fails to write poetry, that is at once poetry, stimulating, persuasive and very skilled.

To go from Mr. Tessimond to Mr. Heath-Stubbs is to make a journey some hundred years back in time—or, rather, to move out of time altogether. For where Mr. Tessimond's poems are particularised and of their time, those in *The Divided Ways* exist in a kind of literary vacuum—a world of projection rather than of reality. But it is not necessary to be dogmatic about the relationship of life to literature or to demand an imaginative approach *through*

reality, to feel that the lack of participation which characterises so many of Mr. Heath-Stubbs' poems cannot but in the long run be detrimental. For his poems—clear and precise in diction, balanced on a careful equipoise of rhythm—come to one in the end as accomplished literary exercises, as substitutes or rehearsals for the real thing. The emotions that exist in poems such as 'The Beggars':

And the people go by, passing me on their road . . .

or 'The Old King':

I could be sorrowful thinking of what I have lost,
But now I am content to sleep

may indeed symbolize a personal sense of frustration and exist validly as a direct expression of that sense of never quite being at the centre of life which Mr. Heath-Stubbs wishes to realize in his poetry, but the effect of this consciously indirect method of stating his feelings is to divorce them from actuality.

Perhaps though it is asking too much of every poet to want him to 'participate' in his time. Instead Mr. Heath-Stubbs offers a leisurely view of the backwaters of literature—a recreation of poetic myths in delicately displayed forms, in sonnets, sestinas, ballades, by whose formal conventions the harsher brutalities of contemporary suffering are muted to painless music. Art has become a decoration to be admired but not shared, and poetry an accomplishment, not a necessity.

ALAN ROSS

JUNIORS, SENIORS AND IN-BETWEENS

HERBERT READ, *Annals of Innocence and Experience* (Faber & Faber, 10s. 6d. net, 234 pages); RAYNER HEPPENSTALL, *Poems*, 1933-45 (Secker & Warburg, 7s. 6d. net, 100 pages); NORMAN MCCAIG, *The Inward Eye* (Routledge, 5s. net, 60 pages); ROLAND MATHIAS, *Break in Harvest* (Routledge, 5s. net, 57 pages); ROBERT HERRING, *Westwood Look* (Maclellan, 6s. net, 43 pages).

'A unity of the aesthetic and the moral should logically include the practical, for this philosophy of mine though general is not abstract, but in the proper sense of the word, materialistic.' So wrote Herbert Read in the first edition of his book, *Annals of Innocence and Experience*. For the last term of his statement the word 'existential' is now substituted, and all who recognize the author's integrity will know that this

change implies something more than mere lip-service to an intellectual fashion.

Elsewhere, Read has thought fit to retain the original term 'materialistic' as proclaiming the physical and sensuous basis of his idea of the universe. To-day, however, the word 'materialistic' too often suggests a hard-and-fast dogma; that somewhat sclerotic system of knowledge derived from the work of nineteenth century science.

From such a side-whiskered atheism the writing of Read is quite exempt. Non-academic and non-doctrinaire, he has always considered the validity of thought to exist in the strength of its creative propositions ; in a word in its own *live-ability*.

This, then, is the sense in which he has now correctly rechristened the nature of his outlook; and a further confirmation of the actuality of the author's mind is seen in the inclusion of a thirty-page chapter omitted from the earlier edition and first published by the Hogarth Press in 1925. This is 'A Journal of the Retreat of the Fifth Army from St. Quentin, March, 1918,' and in every way is worthy of permanent preservation. Those unacquainted with the author's war writing may well be astonished on reading this prose—so sensitive, tensile, objective and direct—when they consider the mind behind it has achieved distinguished triumphs in fields so far removed. Perhaps, too, they will be led to obtain another short work on the same theme by Read, published as a Criterion Miscellany pamphlet in 1930 and entitled *Ambush*. Did I say 'obtain'? That is all but impossible. Perhaps Messrs. Faber might offer some assistance.

Until his recent recognition by the B.B.C. Rayner Heppenstall remained an author as interesting and original as he was neglected. And his present good fortune is richly deserved. Apart from three volumes of verse, two novels and a book on Middleton Murry, he also gave us the one adult work in the literature of ballet which England can boast. Here, our concern must be limited to the first.

Poems, 1933-45, contains all that the author wishes to preserve of his output over a period of thirteen years, containing work from *First Poems* (1935), *Sebastian* (1937) and *Blind Men's Flowers are Green* (1940).

Mr. Heppenstall is certainly a 'difficult' poet; a condition in his case deriving not only from a loaded idiosyncracy of style, but also from the individual and peculiar mysticism which he has professed So, to the dionysic near-incoherence of excited language in *First Poems:*

Sun's guise to-day that plate of red acid: through
Fog's lilies eats down, tapping the flags then
Till Time's iron tongues derision on the brain's
O unfreshment beat'

one must add the involution of thought which characterises *Sebastian:*

Me in that time Time's self
Quite relinquished, and the tide of physical acts that
sustain with Time
Life's system of tensions, the flowing magnetic field of life,
Cast utterly off.

Mr. Heppenstall, as religious poet, is a mystical kind of Expressionist, and suggests himself to me in the image of a Whitman reared on Hopkins and Donne. Relinquishing the delineation of his introvert ontological world, he writes with occasional lucid precision, clarified feeling, and formal control. Nor do I know of another image which summons-up the home-sick conscript so tellingly as those in the following lines:

The winter hardens. Every night I hear
The patient khaki beast grieve in his stall,
His eyes behind the hard fingers soft as wool.

All the collective melancholy of billet life is incapsulated here.

The Inward Eye is the second volume of verse by Mr. Norman McCaig: a body of poems more shapely and controlled than the first, in which he seemed to be performing a bugle-call rag of 'Apocalyptic' art:

I brought you elephants and volcano tops
and a eucalyptus tree on a coral island.

So he was writing in 'The White Horseman'; and although his world is still, in the main, a 'strictly private' territory—the land of a musical solipsist, so to speak—its meaning and reference is becoming more clear:

My tiny season, my cold and gentle spring
when again will you win silence and be curled
and crimped in ornaments of the goldsmith sun,
and old bucolic time lie in his weathers
content to hear his four sweet seasons sing.

This is, perhaps, the most 'daylight' passage. We can hope, however, that the light will grow.

Break in Harvest is the first book of verse by Roland Mathias, a young Welsh poet born in 1915.

With a powerful sense of regional appeal—those particularised charms of individual landscapes—he does not lock up his heart in Cymru and refuse to exercise his gifts beyond its borders.

So it occurs that one of his best poems speaks with feeling of Oxfordshire:

> *Your names have music. Wychwood runnels bring*
> *Simple unreason to my rising throat:*
> *Unasked abandon fingers at each note*
> *Arraigning an andante opening:*

—a nice 'betrayal' of 'home-bred' scenery which certain narrow nationalists no doubt regard askance.

Robert Herring has long been known as an editor of catholic taste who has opened his pages to many schools of verse and imported the poetry of every 'little Power'.

Westwood Look is constituted of poems written by himself from two to twenty-five years ago; and provides, as it were, a 'glass of fashion' in which the chameleon Zeitgeist of verse has left it various passing reflections—an album of poetic 'poly-photos' of one's time. From mock-Elizabethan, via Imagist puns, to the borrowed storm-wrack of 'Apocalyptic' song, the author leapfrogs the decades and centuries, merrily mixing the tenses in a cocktail which he quizzically hands us as 'Life and Letters To-day'.

DEREK STANFORD

THE CATS MIAOW

The Poet's Cat, an Anthology compiled by MONA GOODEN (Harrap, 7s. 6d.).

Mona Gooden is obviously a devotee, and whatever sings the praises or occasionally utters the felicitous, and therefore memorable, curse of her feline friends finds a place in her pages; but as one flicks them over it occurs to one how revealing an approach it is

> '. . . *to see*
> *What* cat *has made of man.*

If, like Wordsworth's more exalted speculation, it sometimes 'pains me much', Mona Gooden is scarcely to blame.

She distinguishes three types of 'cat poetry', apart from invectives: the fabulist poems, like Gay's and La Fontaine's, which symbolically moralize, often engagingly enough; the descriptive poems concentrating objectively on the cat's qualities: Cowper's comfort-seeking pet, or Gray's goldfish-questing suicide. And the third kind? Well, let Miss Gooden speak:

'In these we find appreciation of the universal beauty and grace of the feline race, and understanding of cat nature in all its subtle, inconsistent and capricious charm. To this class belong the elegiac poems by writers who loved their cats as friends, and whose cats undoubtedly loved them in return.'

Naturally, it is this third group that predominates, and its contents are drawn not only from ancient and modern English poets, but include translation from the Greek, Latin, Arabic, French and early Irish—among the latter the eighth century anonymous *Pangur Bán*, perhaps the best 'companionship' piece in the book:

I and Pangur Bán, my cat,
'Tis a like task we are at;
Hunting mice is his delight,
Hunting words I sit all night.

'Gainst the wall he sets his eye
Full and fierce, and sharp and sly;
'Gainst the wall of knowledge I
All my little wisdom try.

It is a revealing commentary on the evolution of our civilization and its tastes to trace the 'progress' from the gentle simplicity of Joachim du Bellay's *Epitaph on a Pet Cat*, via the wheezy sentimentalities of James Thomson or Joanna Baillie ('Whence hast thou then, thou witless puss/The magic power to charm us thus?), or Shelley's doggerel *Verses on a Cat*, to the ruminative pity of Hardy's *Last Words to a Dumb Friend:*

Strange it is this speechless thing,
Subject to our mastering,
Subject for his life and food
To our gift, and time, and mood;
Timid pensioner of us Powers,
His existence ruled by ours,
Should—by crossing at a breath
Into safe and shielded death,

By the merely taking hence
Of his insignificance—
Loom as largened to the sense,
Shape as part, above man's will,
Of the Imperturbable,

the meticulous observation of Edmund Rostand, or the harsh realism of William Rose Benét's *Street of Cats,* coupled with the humorous fantasies of Eliot's *Macavity* and Dorothy Sayers' *War Cat,* or the incarnate felinities of Ruth Pitter's *Quorum Porum** or *The Matron Cat's Song* (and what a very good cat poet Ruth Pitter is!).

'These I have loved . . .' And what else? The last section of Wordsworth's *The Kitten and Falling Leaves,* with its concluding aspiration:

Spite of care, and spite of grief,
To gambol with Life's falling leaf;

Christopher Smart's pæon for his cat, Geoffrey, patently a celestial cousin to Blake's *Tyger;* Seumas O'Sullivan's translation from the Latin of John Jortin's *Epitaphium Felis,* and the Latin elegiac note that has slipped into his own *Tony's Grave:*

. . . The dark that none can stay
Awaits the sunset of our mortal day;

the Hardy-esque questioning of Oliver Edwards's *The Cat and the Man;* or of the ending of J. V. Schiffel's *Lays of Tom-Cat Hiddigeigei:*

Human nature! who can bear it?
Crooked ways and wicked wiles!
Wrapped in consciousness of merit,
Sits the tom-cat on the tiles!

a consciousness not perhaps altogether illusory, for, as the anthologist reminds us:

'Human beings batten on cows, sheep, pigs and birds of every description, not always mercifully killed either; and when one considers the mass slaughter and cold-blooded tortures inflicted by men on each other in our time, it would be mere extravagance to dwell unduly on the occasional cruelty of the cat.' 'Mere extravagance' has the air of a classic understatement!

Friends of the feline fraternity will readily recognize this book as the Cat's Miaow.

HERMANN PESCHMANN

**Porum,* genitive plural of puss!

THAT RARER THING

WALT WHITMAN, *Leaves of Grass*. A new and comprehensive edition with an introduction and notes by Emory Holloway. Everyman Library (Dent's), 4s.

When as a child one sat on one's father's knee, all one saw was his face and his waistcoat.

When standing one seldom got much further than his knees, all that towered above was out of focus. Some things are too large to be seen in their entirety at a glance. How few sailors have really seen the whole of a whale? This has long been Walt Whitman's fate in relation to his readers. If, then, he is too big to get into a life-time, how difficult must it be to get him into a review.

As long as the world is bad, goodness will cause trouble. His name has been a battlefield for critics and literary historians since the first publication of the *Leaves of Grass* in 1855.

Real greatness in a working-class person almost causes the middle-brows to foam at the mouth. Remember Lawrence, and before him, Blake! Nor could they cope with Walt Whitman. Yet, somewhere inside their overfurnished minds there is a germ of truth that won't allow them to ignore him.

In his *Literary History of America*, Professor Barrett Wendel, of Harvard, is very patronizing indeed, yet in this almost official book of nearly six hundred pages, which contains no other illustrations whatsoever, the frontispiece is a portrait of Whitman.

Americans consider him almost European in his easy-going all-embracing humanism. 'Not till the sun excludes you will I exclude you.' In this he was indeed to forestall Dostoievsky. His emphasis was on equality and fraternity as opposed to the classic American stressing of liberty. Yet to the rest of the world he has always seemed more American than any three of her other writers.

They can say what they like about Walt Whitman, and they have said both foolish and disgusting things. The depths were reached finally by Mr. John Brophy in *John o' London's* before the war. But all men who are in communion with the spirit of loveliness in life will love him.

It is a mistake to think of Whitman as a poet of the people like Burns or Mayakovsky or Lorca. The whole style and form of his verse, if nothing else, would prevent this. He was that rarer thing, a poet of the dream behind democracy.

Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, one of the classic examples of English prose-poetry, was the preface to the *Leaves of Grass*, which in themselves are the corner-stone of a true democratic culture.

What Villon and Dante were to the Middle Ages, what Shakespeare was to the Renaissance, Walt Whitman is to that world in the beginning of which there were three words: liberty, equality and fraternity.

Walt Whitman who, with Herman Melville, is perhaps the greatest of American writers, was the first to spring from that country's working-class. Yet he had more in common with the Goethe-like Thomas Jefferson than any among Boston's many Brahmins. He was more gentle than any gentleman, if sometimes as vulgar as a New York bar-tender.

There is really little use in quoting Whitman (however, I probably shall), for it needs the whole of his work to express the size of the man, the multitudes he contained, and the contradictions. Dylan Thomas always says that if ever he were to edit an anthology of verse in this language, he would just put the words the 'Leaves of Grass' under the author's name and leave it at that.

Whitman is something new in the literary history of the world. Unlike almost any other 'great' man, his life was the life of an average person. He was never a success. He had more difficulty in getting an editor to take a poem at sixty-five than Stephen Spender did when he was twenty-five.

Unlike most people who possess it, Whitman's literary greatness never protected him from the rough-and-tumble of the ordinary life of a working person.

He had no Ayot St. Lawrence, no country house, no publisher was in a hurry to print him, no committees rushed to shower him with literary awards. He was never popular with the public. Yet he saved a little money, about as much as a member of the N.U.R. might save to-day.

Tennyson wrote to him affectionately, and Oscar Wilde called at his little back street residence, while Emerson knew that the *Leaves of Grass*, first published as a pamphlet by the author himself, was the most important book yet to appear in America. He knew this and said so, a few weeks after he received his first copy.

Yet during the great heyday of American letters, during that period which is known as the Flowering of New England, when Boston with Cambridge and Concord considered as suburbs, was,

in the opinion of Spengler, a 'culture city' of a homogeneous commonwealth, as Florence, Bruges and Weimar had been in other ages, the two really great American writers, Melville and Whitman, were almost, if not quite, ignored.

I have tried desperately to remain restrained in writing this review, because in whatever room I have lived since I left my nursery, Walt Whitman has always also been an inhabitant. In these lines of his that follow, you will see what one means when one says that the whole basis of Socialism's claim to man's attention, are the very ideas and beliefs which are crowded into these American poems which have long since found their way in the hearts and on to the bookshelves of every country in the world.

Shut not your doors to me, proud libraries,
For that which was lacking on all your well-filled shelves, yet needed most, I bring,
Forth from the war emerging, a book I have made
The words of my book nothing.
The drift of it everything,
A book separate, not linked with the rest nor felt by the intellect,
But you, ye untold latencies, will thrill to every page.

Now, Walt Whitman meant something very different by the word democracy than Mr. Truman does. Yet whenever England and America are at war, as allies, they always try to get him on to their band-wagon. During such a war, articles on him always reappear in the literary press.

This new Everyman Edition may very properly be considered a standard one. Yet the introduction by Emory Holloway, a university professor, reads in places like an after-dinner speech at a recruiting rally.

In it he says, speaking about Whitman's reaction to the Civil War: 'When the first gun spoke, it was to Whitman a flash of lightning electrifying the oppressive murk of low-hanging skies . . . his relief and exaltation are recorded in his poems. . . . But the arrogance of his pride in green armies marching forth to war wears off as battles are lost.'

Now, and just listen to this, when the war started on April 12th, 1861, Whitman left New York and went away alone to figure out what he was going to do. He was too old to be called-up. Surely people of this generation know that feeling.

All his biographies, and thirty are listed in this book, have tried to find out what Whitman was doing for the first twenty months of the war (April, 1861, to December, 1862), during which he disappeared. Some have even called him a deserter. Obviously he hated war as much as he loved 'the Union of these States'.

So it wasn't until the mock glory had departed, and the misery of war became evident that he entered into it, as a hospital and battlefield nurse and tended the wounded *on both sides*, which earned for him the title, 'The Good Grey Poet'. For reference, see Edgar Lee Masters' *Whitman*, pages 112 to 115. Surely Professor Holloway knows all this—he has written a book on Whitman!

Walt Whitman was the John the Baptist to a christ who never came. Literature has had many great men, he was its only great child.

PAUL POTTS

A SOUL FOR SALE

PATRICK KAVANAGH, *A Soul For Sale* (Macmillan), 5s. net.

It should be evident at once that Kavanagh is a poet of quality. His subject matter is almost entirely drawn from the people and life of the little farms in Co. Monaghan in the North of Ireland. And, suitably enough, his style is bare and has no trimmings; it displays an instinctive workmanship. He views life through the eyes of an Irish Roman Catholic, aware of the thickening frustration of a countryside which emigration and poverty—and the deep historical causes of which these are two obvious results—are eating away.

'The Great Hunger' (included here) is a long poem in which the veil is lifted off a typical peasant farmer, Patrick Maguire, mother-dominated, sex-frustrated, land-denied. We see him working at plough-time and harvest-home, playing greasy cards with his pub cronies, kneeling behind a pillar in church where he can spit unobserved, pondering continually on ways and means of satisfying his sexual impulse, but finding none, excepting masturbation over the dying peat fire. There is no release, not even with his mother's death and the presumably final severance of the umbilical cord. Afraid in life—

Maguire is not afraid of death, the Church will light him a candle
To see his way through the vaults and he'll understand the
Quality of the clay that dribbles through his coffin

If he opens his eyes once in a million years—
Through a crack in the crust of the earth he may see a face nodding in
Or a woman's legs. Shut them again for that sight is sin.

Kavanagh occasionally writes lyrics of force and delicacy, often stereoscopic in quality: it is interesting and significant to notice that, although he has lived several years in Dublin, he carefully eschews city imagery, as he does the fashionable clichés of psycho-analysis and social comment. It is well that he continues faithfully to tap the limitless reservoir of a childhood lived in the grey, stony, whin-country of Monaghan.

A Soul For Sale is important because it is poetry; and because it is poetry, it is an important statement of the position in the Ireland of the past couple of decades. These poems, taken together, form a passionate, authentic, bitter, lyrical commentary on contemporary Irish life; and in them Patrick Kavanagh comes to his full stature as a poet. He hasn't 'sold out'.

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